



## ***PUBLIC SAFETY & SECURITY COMMITTEE***

February 16, 2017

*The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 96% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate the opportunity to testify on bills of interest to towns and cities.*

### **SB 763      “An Act Concerning Workers’ Compensation Coverage for Police Officers, Firefighters and Emergency Medical Technicians with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder”**

My name is Steve Werbner, Town Manager of Tolland on behalf of CCM.

**CCM opposes SB 763** as it would impose a significantly negative impact on municipal budgets and administrative resources.

The bill would provide for medical and full wage replacement under Workers’ Compensation for local and state police, career and volunteer firefighters, and emergency medical technicians (EMTs), diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder as the result of “visually witnessing the death of a human being, or the immediate aftermath of such death...”

CCM acknowledges and values the important role public safety personnel have in our communities. We are grateful for their commitment to protect and serve and for the risks they assume on behalf of Connecticut’s residents. What is at question is whether local property taxpayers – and their municipal budgets – should be mandated to provide special mental stress benefits from “witnessing” or its “aftermath” – without any financial assistance from the State.

### **Towns and cities cannot afford to these benefits without the help of the State.**

- Depending on the circumstance, as noted by OFA in similar proposals from years past, the cost of an individual case for either partial disability or permanent total claim could range from \$10,000 to over \$1 million for the duration of the claim. In addition, the administrative and legal costs to manage the increased volume of claims filed under the proposal – irrespective of the cost from providing the special benefits – would have a negative impact on local budgets.

As indicated in the Governor’s proposed budget, municipal aid will likely be reduced by a considerable amount in the upcoming Fiscal Year. The reduction in state aid, along with

towns and cities heavy reliance on the property tax, this proposal will erode the finances of municipal budgets.

### **The bill is overly broad**

- Includes all incidents where a first responder may respond to, including motor vehicle accidents. As well, would provide coverage to an individual that may have witnessed the “immediate aftermath” up to six hours after the scene is secured by law enforcement. In some incidents, such as a fire or motor vehicle accident, law enforcement (i.e. police) may not be responsible for securing the scene.
- “Visually witnessing” is subject to interpretation and could mean simply viewing photographs or videos of an incident or crime scene, or of the deceased or injured victim.
- “Death” can be subject to interpretation by meaning either actually witnessing a person’s final breath, or if the individual later died (i.e. in route or at the hospital) which then could be considered “witnessing a death”.

### **Municipal Resources to Assist with “Neck Up” Injuries Currently Exist**

- Towns and cities already offer health insurance, disability leave and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) to employees suffering from mental or emotional impairments.
- Police officers already have coverage for mental or emotional impairments for instances in which they use or are subjected to deadly force.
- Firefighters already have coverage for mental or emotional impairments for instances in which they witness the death of another firefighter while on-duty.

It is critical that options outside of the workers’ compensation system are considered that would ensure the intent of SB 763 is upheld in a sustainable and equitable way. The issue of determining how to assist state and local employees who are affected by certain, tragic events must be solved with a statewide solution. **Lawmakers should therefore consider some of the following approaches:**

- Dedicate a percentage of the State’s Rainy Day Fund to support the Sandy Hook Workers’ Assistance Fund which was created three years ago in Special Act 13-1;
- Amend the eligibility of the Fund and the deadlines to access the Fund by making it a permanent statewide resource that could be modeled after the Second Injury Fund, or

The General Assembly has, and should continue to be wise to take no action on this proposed new state mandate. The current fiscal climate should prompt relief from existing state mandates, and all new proposed mandates – regardless of merit – be opposed.

CCM urges the Committee to **take no action** on SB 763.

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If you have any questions, please contact Mike Muszynski, Advocacy Manager of CCM at [mmuszynski@ccm-ct.org](mailto:mmuszynski@ccm-ct.org) or (203) 500-7556.

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